



OFFICE OF THE CITY AUDITOR COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO

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20-04 Colorado Springs Police Department Evidence Inventory Capacity

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Purpose

The project will evaluate the use of space in the Police Department's Evidence Unit. We previously performed this analysis in 2012 and estimated some critical areas could experience storage space limitations as early as 2015. We will review the changes that have been made and attempt to identify areas of critical concern.

Highlights

We conclude evidence inventory levels were at all-time highs and growing. An evidence operations process review, done in collaboration with Colorado Springs Police Department (CSPD) identified opportunities to manage inventory levels more effectively. Four recommendations were identified starting on page 3 of this report.

Projected Space Remaining (2020 - 2025)							
Location	06/2019 Inventory	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Drug Room	36,091	22%	20%	17%	15%	12%	9%
Cold Storage	7,277	4%	-2%	-8%	-14%	-20%	-26%
Handguns	3,094	5%	-1%	-6%	-11%	-16%	-22%
Long guns	810	24%	22%	21%	20%	18%	17%
Annex Storage	65,235	15%	10%	6%	1%	-4%	-9%
General Storage	287,609	25%	20%	15%	10%	5%	0%

*CSPD is in the process of acquiring additional cold storage .

CSPD acts as the custodian of evidence and personal property. Disposals are subject to regulatory and judicial authorizations often outside CSPD control. Given the increasing volume of evidence inventory, CSPD requested the Office of City Auditor (OCA) facilitate a 3-day lean process improvement event with Evidence Unit personnel considered subject matter experts (SMEs.)

As of June 2019, there were over 404,000 items in inventory, compared to 224,000 in 2012. Commendable efforts by the Evidence Unit and CSPD managed storage

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Management Response

Management was in agreement with our recommendations. Detailed responses can be found on page 3 and page 4 of this report.

Recommendations

1. Implement intake process improvements identified and evaluate efficiency of specific sub-steps in the intake process.
2. Consult with appropriate parties to establish an administrative disposition process as appropriate.
3. Evaluate current staffing arrangements and make adjustments within control of the evidence unit to maximize efficiency.
4. Where feasible, correct identified data inconsistencies and research methods to improve effectiveness of current software applications.

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capacity and inventory levels beyond the maximum capacity projected in the 2012 OCA review. Updated projections indicate capacity issues will occur as early as 2021 given current circumstances. Factors contributing to the increase in inventory included an increase in the number of cases per year and the number of evidence items submitted per case. Both have steadily increased from 2012 to 2018.

The total number of items processed annually by the Evidence Unit has increased since our prior review. Intakes have increased year to year while disposals have decreased. The net effect is an average increase of 28,753 items annually for 2016 to 2018.

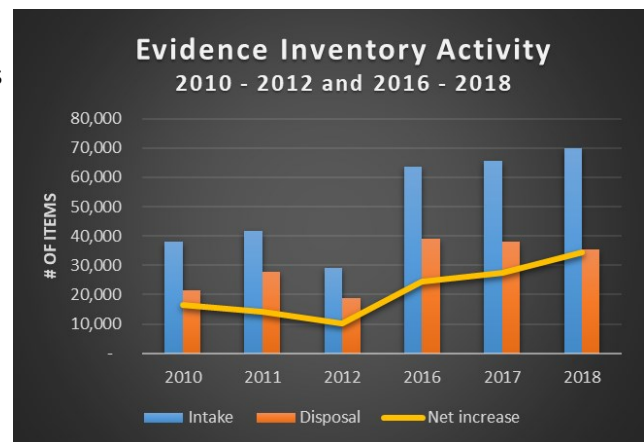
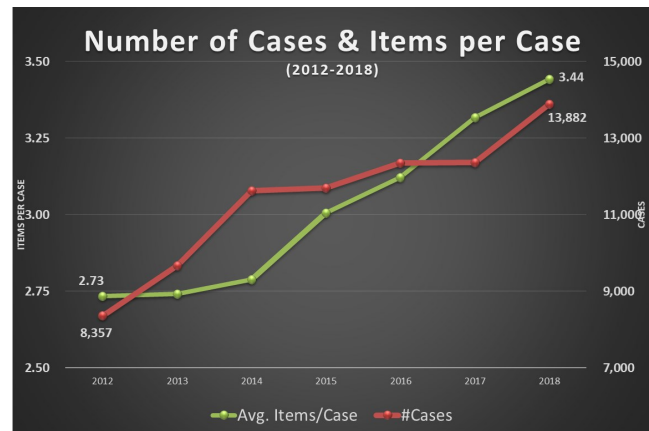
Based on recent data and current processes, the Evidence Unit would need to add 3.5 technicians focused on disposals in order to achieve zero annual increase in inventory.

OCA's inventory data analytic review and the process event review focused on inventory disposals. One of multiple criteria involved in determining when an item may be released from evidence inventory is the statute of limitations (SOL). Based on initial data analytics of the assigned retention code, a significant number of items appear to be held beyond the SOL. However, once charges are filed, progress of the case through the legal system, not SOL, determines the retention requirements.

Further, the Evidence Unit is subject to laws, regulations, and approvals from outside agencies which dictate when items may be eligible for disposal. Because the Evidence Unit is primarily a custodial function, extensive research must be done to determine which items are releasable. Separate information systems for the Evidence Unit, CSPD operations, and the courts were not integrated. When the status of a case changes in one system, the evidence system was not automatically updated. System limitations and data integrity issues were identified, which contribute to the difficulty of the research and disposition processes.

The observations and recommendations in this report are the result of the OCA's observations and data analysis combined with Evidence Unit SMEs knowledge. Some process review data, such as time spent on a particular task, or frequency of errors in a process step, were not audited. OCA utilized the information estimated or provided by SMEs that would not have otherwise been obtained due to time constraints.

The auditors would like to acknowledge the contributions made by the process improvement team and the support from CSPD command in making their staff available for the event.



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Observation 1

Intake begins when officers package and record evidence. Evidence technicians identified errors with initial packaging, incomplete or discrepant data, and an ineffective discrepancy reporting process that contributed to prolonged time spent conducting intake steps. Discrepancies must be corrected to ensure accurate inventory records, safety, and proper storage. All items for intake were being processed with no backlog of items awaiting intake. However, improvements in the intake process would give technicians more time for disposition activities and could reduce the time required by officers for evidence handling. The intake process was estimated to take up to 30% of reported Evidence Unit hours.

Management Response:

We agree with the recommendation. The Evidence Unit will evaluate the recommended process improvements. Improvement projects will be prioritized based on factors including safety, legal requirements, potential for increased value/efficiency, resources required, and strategic goals. The Evidence Unit will partner with stakeholders and consider organizational impact of any changes. The Evidence Unit will spend the remainder of the year evaluating and prioritizing these projects and will implement those with the greatest potential for success by the end of the year. Implementation began in January to address training, packaging and application improvements.

Recommendation

The Evidence Unit should implement the intake process improvements identified during the review that are under departmental control. The Evidence Unit should also conduct additional process reviews of specific intake steps, such as officer processing tasks, to identify potential accuracy, safety, and efficiency improvements.

Observation 2

During the process improvement event, the team identified the inability to group inventory data with similar characteristics as a root cause of the disposition backlog. The characteristics included status of court proceedings, relationships of involved parties, and status of research steps already completed. Without the ability to group similar items together for disposition based on predefined parameters, the Evidence Unit must research each item and case prior to disposition requiring a significant time investment. Determination of disposition criteria requires input from the District Attorney's Office, courts, and CSPD operations. Higher number of disposals would be possible if the data and processes were adapted.

Management Response:

We agree with the recommendation. By July 1st, 2020 the Evidence Unit will establish criteria to group items representing low risk and high storage consumption. The unit will collaborate with the Chain of Command and the DA's Office to request authorization for disposition based on mutual requirements and standards. The Evidence Unit initiated discussions with the evidence software provider on 02/07/2020 to identify potential solutions within the evidence tracking system.

Recommendation

The Evidence Unit should consult with appropriate internal and external parties to identify and administratively disposition items based on authorized criteria as appropriate. The Unit should also review the current software program for potential increased functionality to group items together based on specific attributes.

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Observation 3

Additional technicians and/or process improvements would be needed to begin reducing the overall number of items held in inventory. Areas were identified for staffing related potential process improvements. Examples included scheduling of intake routes, identification of staff core competencies, handling of bicycles, and increased use of administrative holds.

The current staffing plan includes a part time position which has been difficult to keep filled.

Recommendation

Evaluate the current staffing arrangements , consider adding staff, and make adjustments within the control of the Evidence Unit to improve effectiveness.

Management Response:

We agree with the recommendation. By July 1st, 2020 the Evidence Unit will evaluate core competencies of staff and adjust scheduling and training to ensure greatest efficiency and strength of the unit. The Evidence Manager will prepare a justification regarding the benefits of changing the part-time position to a full-time position and will discuss this with the Chain of Command through the budgetary process. We believe there are opportunities to better use the evidence system for officer evidence submissions and will evaluate the system and current processes to look for potential efficiencies.

Observation 4

Evidence technicians must utilize multiple computer systems from multiple agencies to perform their duties. These systems do not integrate or share information, which often results in redundant data entry and inefficient research. For example if the offense changes from a felony to a misdemeanor after some evidence has been gathered, the change does not automatically update the retention period in the evidence inventory system. Several iterations of software have been used by CSPD, and the courts. These software changes have resulted in multiple data sets existing in various historical and current databases. Efficiencies could be realized if current databases could be modified or integrated.

Recommendation

Where feasible, identified data inconsistencies should be corrected. Improvements to existing applications to increase the effectiveness of the technicians and accuracy of data should be researched for possible implementation.

Management Response:

We agree with the recommendation. The Evidence Supervisor has begun correcting the data inconsistencies surrounding retention codes. CSPD is already in the RFP process to hire a consultant to develop a five year technology plan. One of the focuses of that assessment will be a review of the evidence system and software. By March 31, 2020, the Evidence Manager will draft a memo to the Chain of Command outlining the inefficiencies with the existing applications and systems used for disposition research for consideration during the review. The Evidence Unit initiated discussions with the evidence software provider on 02/07/2020 to identify potential solutions within the evidence tracking system.

This audit was conducted in conformance with the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing, a part of the Professional Practices Framework promulgated by the Institute of Internal Auditors.